



**visits4u case studies:**  
**Château des Ducs de Bretagne**  
**Nantes, France**

## Château des ducs de Bretagne

Nantes, France

Title: Integrating Accessibility in the Reconstruction of the Castle



### Description

The Château des ducs de Bretagne (English: Castle of the Dukes of Brittany) is a large castle located in the city of Nantes in the Loire-Atlantique department of France; it served as the centre of the historical province of Brittany until its separation in 1941. It is located on the right bank of the Loire, which formerly fed its ditches. It was the residence of the Dukes of Brittany between the 13th and 16th centuries, subsequently becoming the Breton residence of the French Monarchy.

The castle has been listed as a monument histories by the French Ministry of Culture since 1862. Today the castle houses the Nantes History Museum.

### Becoming inclusive:

#### 1. Description

Between 2004 et 2007, important renovation works were carried out. Their purpose was to valorise the monument and to make the Duke's 15th Century castle the new home of the museum, while respecting spaces, structure and monumental appearance. Access for disabled people was at the heart of the project : for the castle and museum are to be accessible

to all. Consultation has played a major role, notably through the appointment of an Access Officer.

### 3. Description of steps taken, changes and progress

The castle of the Dukes of Brittany has been the subject of major renovation works. Accessibility has been integrated into the project right at the start and in all phases of the project. The objectives of this sizable renovation and modernisation project include linking museum and town, access for all publics, as well as the use of new technologies in the service of the visitor experience.

The castle is an enclosed fortress which had only one entry over a drawbridge for visitors prior to the start of the renovation works. Historical analysis of the castle revealed that there had earlier been two other ways of access : an emergency entry and an entry from the Loire riverside, which had been landfilled in XXth Century. The emergency entry had been rebuilt for the benefit of visitors with mobility difficulties. A new horizontal footbridge, which connects the entry with the courtyard has been built where there had been one in the past. This new entry has the advantage of being close to an accessible tramway stop and car park : it creates a seamless access journey.



Access to the main, entirely paved entry has been re-thought. The joints in sandstone, first chosen by the chief architect and in keeping with its historic fabric wore out fast. In addition to access challenges, these joints presented problems for comfort and security. They were replaced by joints in a material which comes close to historic veracity and is more durable. The renovation of the castle and museum was the opportunity of creating a new walkway on the ramparts. Up to this point, these had only

been accessible via stairways, and only portions of it were accessible. A lift, unobtrusively fitted against the Grand Gouvernement building preserves the architectural integrity of the castle. A footbridge connects the lift with the ramparts, half the length of which has been made accessible. Full access to the ramparts for visitors with mobility difficulties was not possible, as several flights of stairs could not be removed.

Two buildings, the Grand Logis and the Grand Gouvernement separated by the space called Jacobins form the museum. The two main buildings have a number of floor levels at differing heights. The spiral staircases which lead up to them are known to cause discomfort even for visitors with no mobility problems. The Jacobins space, situated within a tower, had previously been destroyed. Its walls and roof had been renovated. This vast central space has been preserved emptied of its floors to serve as a large space for organising visitor flow. A lift now provides access to most floors of the Grand Logis. This new re-fit improves the legibility of the building's architecture. The lift could not provide access to all levels. A platform lift was therefore installed at the level of the attic and opens up access to the big mezzanine.



It was not possible to provide a loop shaped route for visitors of the museum, given its spatial structure. Visitors explore one level at a time and come back to the central pavilion to visit the next one. One of the aims of the exhibition design was to put earlier floor levels on show. A deeper lying older floor level, or «likely archaeological level» can thus be viewed in some rooms. As they represent a health hazard, metal handrails have been installed in front of them.

Various interpretation tools are on offer for a more interesting visit by people with disabilities. They also provide a different experience to all publics. Several spaces combine to offer a sensory trail experienced via sound, sight, touch and smell available for all visitors. In addition to these «visits for all», specific tours and accessible formats have been developed to meet the requirements of several groups of visitors with disabilities. These include multi-media guides in French Sign Language, audio and tactile resources for people with a visual impairment and learning resources for visitors with a learning difficulty.

#### 4. Main stakeholders / actors

Main stakeholders and actors was Town of Nantnes, Pascal Prunet - chief of historic monuments, Jean-Francois Bodin - architect and museographer.

The City has adopted a Disability Action Plan. Therefore, the manager worked with technical staff from the municipality and with the Nantes Council of Disabled People. Associations of disabled people also participated in the project.

#### 5. Costs of the changes

The restoration program cost 51,530,000 €. The finance for the restoration programme comes from : 58% the municipality ,2% the metropolitan area,7% the department of LoireAtlantique,10% the Pays de la Loire region and 10% European Regional Development Fund  
The chateau does not have specific budget allocated for improvements to meet the needs disabled people. Each project integrates financially the needs of disabled people

Main access works :

1. Connecting castle and town
2. Re-arranging distribution of interior espaces and vertical circulation
3. Enhancing the visit through a range of interpretive means

### Results and Impact

Visitors with a disability are welcome at the Chateau of the Dukes of Brittany. Tours and features adapted to specific disabilities as the following offer summarises:

- Sensory tours open to everyone: these visits allow visitors to discover some of the 19 topics covered by the museum and its exhibitions

through the use of objects, as well as sound, visual, olfactory and tactile experiences.

- Accessible exhibition spaces: visitors can use rest areas and borrow wheelchairs or folding stools.
- Guided tours: Visitors with physical disabilities can follow general or themed guided tours, family tours (museum and exhibitions) or the museum's short tours series.
- Audio guide tactile tour of the museum: using both a special audio guide (only available in French) and different tactile and sound features available throughout the museum, the visit is made accessible to visitors with visual disabilities.
- Exhibition booklets and guides: in Braille, embossed or in large print.
- Guide dogs are welcome.
- The ticket-front desk has induction loops available.
- The multimedia terminals are subtitled and interactive.
- Leaflets summarizing the content of certain films are also available.
- Visual descriptions in French Sign Language (FSL) are available all year round in order to allow visitors with hearing disabilities to discover the museum and the chateau, whether on their own or accompanied. Tours in FSL linked to exhibitions are also on offer.
- The Internet site offers practical information and a presentation of the site in FSL.
- A booklet and educational materials designed for visitors with developmental or learning disabilities: a selection of objects in a dozen or so rooms is highlighted in a booklet and educational materials, for example commentaries, treasure trails, the use of magnets and associations of ideas.
- Different materials allow visitors to discover the museum at their own pace: Colour maps depicting Nantes in a simplified fashion down through the ages, multimedia features (films, terminals, interactive maps) provide information on a variety of subjects, the exhibitions include interactive spaces.
- Group tours: With a guide, by reservation only. A variety of bespoke visits have been designed based on a sensory approach, observation, the handling/touching of objects and participation, such as:
  - the castle down through the ages

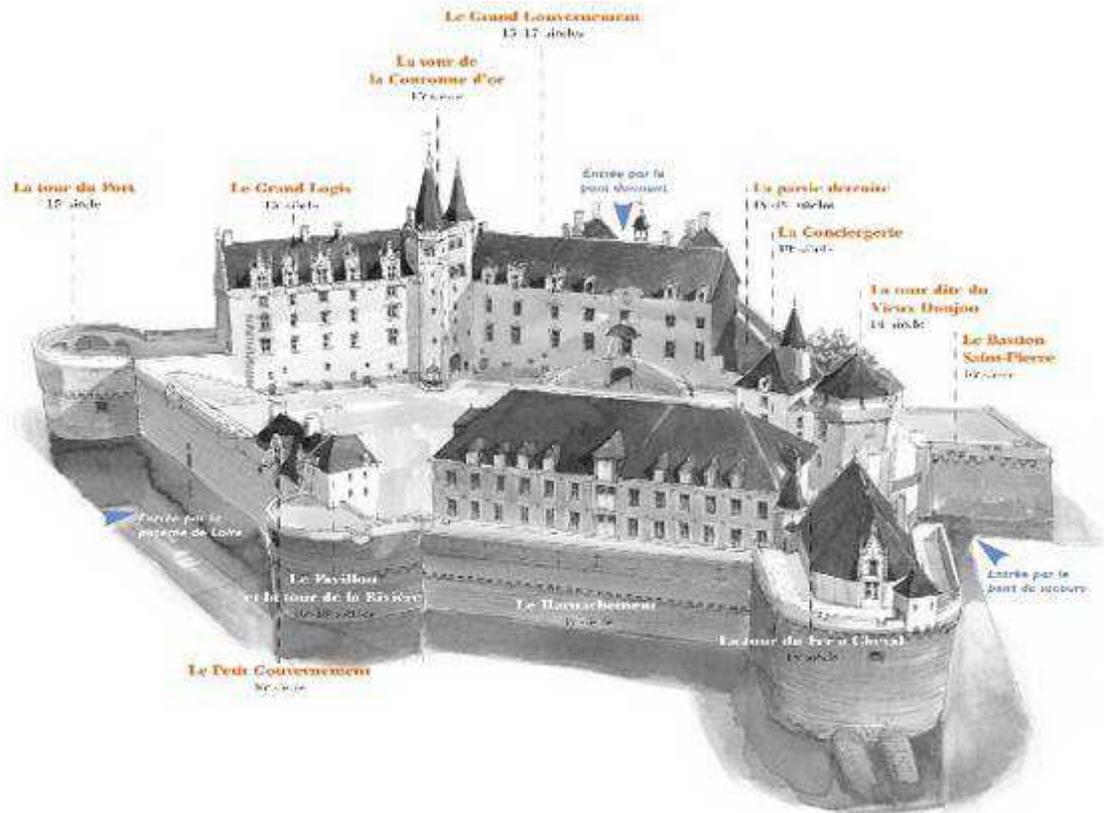
- architectural tour that includes the handling of materials and models
- monsters and stone animals tour of the castle followed by a modelling workshop inspired by the castle's decorative, sculpted features;
- sailors and sea monsters: tour of the museum followed by a modelling workshop;
- the contours of the city: an interactive tour to enable visitors to better understand the city's development and transformation down 20 through the ages.

Today the castle's built environment is almost entirely accessible for people with mobility difficulties. It was awarded the French «Museums for All Award» in 2008 and the French «Tourism and Disability» standard in 2011 for providing accessible experiences to four groups of people with disabilities. 1.4% of the Castle's visitors are known to have a disability, which is considerable for a medieval monument (translator's note: French and UK statistics - which tend to show an average of 7-8% disabled visitors to heritage sites; use different methodologies, making comparisons difficult). The works carried out to improve access for audiences with disabilities resulted in improved ease of usage and comfort for all visitors inside the castle and its surroundings: for example accessible soft surfaces in the castle's yard and improved lighting in the nearby streets between the castle and the cathedral. Access works continue to be carried out in the old town which is in the immediate vicinity (e.g. enlargement of the pavement, removal of barriers and protruding surfaces, the fitting of even granite pavement slabs). The streets adjacent to the castle have become accessible in May 2012 (tramway, car park, even pavements).

### **Lessons learnt**

Incorporating accessibility at the start of the design process - building reconstruction in this case - allowed the castle to become more welcoming for all visitors, not only for disabled tourists.

Furthermore, castle's improved access led to greater visibility and recognition since it received two national awards thanks to these access works.



## Further information

More information you can find on the castle webpage:

<http://www.chateau-nantes.fr>



visits4u is co-funded by the  
COSME Programme of the European Union